

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 134 918

CG 011 160

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TITLE The Utilization of the Time Extended Group Experience
in Counselor Education Practicum Training.
PUB DATE [75]
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the
Texas Personnel and Guidance Association
(Brownsville, Texas, October 8-11, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Clinical Experience; *Counselor Training; *Group
Experience; Higher Education; Interaction Process
Analysis; *Peer Groups; *Practicum Supervision;
Program Descriptions; Psychoeducational Processes;
*Sensitivity Training; *Training Techniques

ABSTRACT

The time extended group experience is recommended for counselor education practicum training for the following reasons: (1) students receive an intense emotional experience that gives them insight into themselves as well as their clients and peers; (2) the class develops a strong group cohesiveness; (3) the supervisors are perceived as real people; (4) students are able to see supervisors in the counselor role and model their behavior; and (5) the method is well-suited to groups ranging in number from 12 to 17.
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ED134918

THE UTILIZATION OF THE TIME EXTENDED GROUP
EXPERIENCE IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION
PRACTICUM TRAINING

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In recent years the concept of training large numbers of counselor educators by means of group methodology has grown and picked up viable strength from all parts of the profession. The fledgling counselors enter the practicum experience equipped with only a baseline information set of didactic theory and varying levels of experiential emotional counseling competence. The Practicum is, none the less, the most important phase at the entire training package. The practicum student is called upon to draw from the reservoir of all he has learned in order to become a counselor in a real life situation.

Neither the didactic information, recently gained, nor any minimal counseling experience seems to adequately prepare the student to handle the personal frustration and anxiety felt in the counseling sessions that follow. Similarly, the pressures common to any academic endeavor such as grades, peer pressure, knowing and feeling confidence in the teacher, and undertaking a new venture, come dynamically into play. These student problems, when compounded by a clearout uncertainty of success, apply potentially destructive pressures to an already sensitive situation.

The practicum supervisor has two primary responsibilities in preparing his students; 1) intellectual growth, 2) emotional insight and understanding. Many others have discussed methodology for teaching the student his intellectual material. Intellectual confidence in counseling ability can be developed in any number of ways discussed

elsewhere (Patterson, 1964; Lister, 1966; Van Atta, 1969; Dreikurs and Sonstegard, 1966; Carkhuff, 1966; and Richardson and Island, 1975).

The second major responsibility of the supervisor is in the area of emotional stability and responsibility. "...learning to be a counselor is both an emotional and intellectual experience, and of the two, the emotional part is the most crucial. The important learning occurs in situations where one's feelings are engaged." (Altucher, 1967). The time extended group process is helpful in this area.

Basic Assumptions

The development of the time extended group experience as a technique for therapeutic change, as well as emotional growth, has recently become popular and many professionals are conducting research on dynamics, process and outcome of the new procedure. Several advantages of the time extended group process have been cited in the literature.

1. The development of the small group (as a unit) is greatly accelerated.
2. Members of the group undergo a more intense emotional experience.
3. The social microcosm of the group is more closely approximated where the group members eat, sleep, laugh, cry and continuously are together with no place to hide.
4. Fatigue, both physical and emotional, contributes to the abandonment of social facades.

(Yalon, 1970; Stroller, 1968; Mintz, 1967; Parloff, 1968; Stoller, 1968)

All of the above mentioned advantages correlate with the basic

problems of time and control of growth that must be directly overcome by the practicum supervisor. The supervisor must be able to create an emotional learning situation whereby the students learn not only from the instructor but also from each of the other counselors in his peer group. The counselors must be able to experience a workable cohesion that permits sharing, modeling, constructive criticism and the reduction of feelings of isolation and frustration among individual members. Cohesion has often been mentioned as a core component in any constructive growth experience. Cohesion has been defined as "the attractiveness of a group for its members." (Frank, 1957). The self-esteem-public esteem system is thus closely related to the concept of group cohesiveness. The cohesiveness developed in the group as a result of the time extended group encounter is therefore a valuable tool for the trainer and the trainee in the practicum setting.

The second advantage of the time extended group encounter is the depth of emotional experience reached in the session. It has been stated by many authors that true change, out of necessity, must be accompanied by discomfort and intense self exploration. The time extended group process provides sufficient time for a capsolated version of all of the curative emotional experiences. The young counselors are allowed to experience the impartation of information, installation of hope, universality, altruism, the recapitulation of the primary family group, development of socializing techniques, imitation (modeling) behavior, interpersonal learning, group cohesiveness and catharsis. (Yalom, 1970)

A side effect of the second advantage of time extended group training, is that the practicum supervisor is able to more successfully

portray himself as a "real human being." The supervisor is therefore able to be a leader, teacher and partner in the practicum venture.

The third major advantage is the development of a social microcosm with its obvious effects on the construction and maintenance of positive peer group relations. Each of the practicum students is afforded the opportunity of stripping masks off the other members and themselves. The acceptance and mutual understanding that follows such an empathetic encounter can only be viewed as emotionally constructive. Successful interaction and communication can be a direct result of having experienced one another in a more intense intrapersonal way. The mechanisms of change mentioned in Lieberman's book of expression of intense personal feelings, self-disclosure, feedback, experiencing strong emotions and cognitive learning, require that a healthy social microcosm as it really is and not as it appears to be or as it is fantasied.

The last major advantage, the abandonment of the social facade, comes as a direct result of the fatigue factor experienced in the time extended group. Fatigue, as used in this context, is unique only to this type of group methodology. Mintz, (1967) identifies four stages of group process as observed in a marathon or extended session: 1. The beginning phase is a working through of anxiety about the marathon itself; 2. The hostile phase incorporates anger at the leader and then between members of the group; 3. The dependency phase occurs as the people express a deep appreciation of each other through physical and verbal contact and finally; 4. Showing of separation anxiety. It is my belief that each of these phases, common to most conventional group, is acted upon as in a catalyst by

the intervening variable of fatigue. Once again the crucial variable of time is again acted upon favorably for the supervisor and the student.

Other Considerations

Yalon (1970) states that, "To some extent the optimal group size is a function of the duration of the meeting: the longer the meeting, the longer the number of patients who can profitably engage in the group." Since most universities are saddled with poor student instructor ratios, the advantages in terms of mechanics become apparent in favor of the extended time group process.

Another consideration is the published success in terms of outcome expanded upon in current literature. For example: 1. Eighty percent of the participants undergo significant change as the result of a single meeting (Stoller, 1968) 2. Thirty-six hours of therapy have proved comparable to several years of conventional ninety-minute weekly group therapy sessions (Navidzadeh, 1968) 3. The marathon group has become a singular agent of change which allows rapidity of learning and adaptation to new behaviors not likely to occur under traditional arrangements (Stoller, 1968) 4. Behavioral break throughs are frequent occurrences within the marathon group. Sometimes the changes are so marked and dramatic as to be difficult to believe. (Stoller, 1968)

Conclusions

In a subjective evaluation of the use of the time extended group with four masters degree candidate sections at North Texas State University over a two year period, I have found that the following

advantages, as previously mentioned in the literature, have remained constant.

1. The practicum students received an intense emotional experience so as to give the new counselors insight into themselves as well as their clients and peers.
2. The class developed a strong group cohesiveness.
3. The time extended group created an arena where the supervisors were able to be perceived as "human beings," and further the creation of a strong rapport.
4. The counselors were able to view the supervisors in the "counselor role" and by contagion to model that behavior.
5. The time extended method was the most successful technique utilized for the emotional management of a group of students that ranged from 12 to 17 in number.

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